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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, we're coming down to the wire on another year of A-ONE. It's the first of December - almost 70 degrees yesterday, and a snowstorm expected tomorrow! Only in New England, folks!

Like Joe will probably mention below, all of the Thanksgiving turkey is but a memory. I tried to stretch it out longer, but I really love my leftover turkey. And so do the dogs. We polished it off fairly quickly this year - it didn't make it a week! I probably won't do another one for the upcoming holidays because we haven't decided where we're going to be yet. Even if it's here, we'll probably do something different (even though I'd really like to do another one!).

It's been a long week. I spent the Thanksgiving holiday nursing another cold; and I actually called in sick for a couple of days - something I've rarely done in all the years that I've worked. And that's a long time! I'm still not back to 100%, but feeling a lot better - thanks for asking! But, feeling under the weather limited my concentration putting things together for this week's issue, so I'm behind quite a bit. And I really hate rushing at the last minute to get an issue out! So, I'm not going to put forth any thoughts this week about a few various issues that are out there these days. There's always another week!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
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Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, Thanksgiving has come and gone, and the last of the turkey sitting in the fridge, waiting for the ceremonial open-faced turkey sandwich dinner, where we use up the absolute last bits and pieces and scraps of meat with gravy over toast. I've probably mentioned this before, but when I was a kid, having the twisted mind that I do, I used to call these "open turkey-face sandwiches".

Of course, there’s another turkey sitting frozen downstairs, just waiting for Christmas. Yep. Two in a row. Hey, cut me some slack, will ya? I only get turkey a couple of times a year, so when I have the opportunity, I go wild.

On another note, remember a long while back I mentioned Charles F. Johnson and his Little Green Footballs (http://littlegreenfootballs.com) website? Now, many of you probably remember LGF as a fantastic source of software for our beloved ST computer. And that’s how I found the site. I was hoping for a trove of software to run under an emulator or on my TT on the occasions I have to fire it up and reminisce.

But that’s not what I found when I pointed my browser toward the site. What I found was a website which seemed dedicated to right-wing extremism, hate-speech and just plain vitriol against anyone who didn’t completely agree with what they were spouting. Remember how I bemoaned the fact that this wasn’t the Charles that I thought I knew... even though I didn’t know him well? Remember how I chalked his attitude about the Bush administration and the things we’d been doing around the world and in our own country (National Security Letters, ’Sneak and Peek’ searches, warrantless wiretaps, etc.) up to some sort of physical or psychological trauma?

Well, this past week CFJ had a change of heart and decided that he didn’t want to be associated with the right wing anymore. That does not, I should point out, mean that he’s now a progressive liberal. All it means is that he can no longer put up with conspiracy nuts who believe that Dubya was a genius, waterboarding is a civil right, and that The Flintstones was based on a true story.

I don’t know what Charles really believes, and to be honest, I don’t care. He has the perfect right, in my mind, under the laws of both man and God, to believe whatever he wants to. My problem has never been with what people believe, really. It’s with what people want everyone else to have to believe.

I’ve always believed that this has been the major difference between ’liberals’ and ’conservatives’: That liberals constantly want to say "you may" while conservatives constantly want to say "you may not". One gives you the option to do something or not do it, according to your own preferences. The other removes your choice altogether.

But today, that is too simplistic a statement of the differences. 35 years ago, I probably would have been considered a "Goldwater Conservative". I’m a fiscal conservative. I believe that government should be accountable to the people it serves and that includes how it collects and spends our money.

But I’m also a social liberal who believes that a government should be answerable to its people, not the other way around.

Big deal, right? I’ll bet that if you put those two statements in front of people, 99% of them would agree with both. But let’s take it a little farther. How about the idea that raising taxes on the rich removes the incentive to work hard and make all that money. Does that really make any sense? Can you picture ANYONE saying, "Oh, well, if I make 2 million dollars this year, the government is going to take an extra 3%, so I’m not going to work that hard... screw them."?

I mean, first of all... and I’m sorry to break the news to you... you do

not make 2 million dollars a year by working hard. You can make $20,000 a year by working hard. You can make $50,000 or $100,000 by working hard. But there comes a point where working hard isn't what it takes anymore. I don't care how hard you work or what you work at. The difference between making $100,000 a year and $2,000,000 a year often comes down to one thing... luck. Being in the right place at the right time and catching the breaks. I'm not saying that you can make two million by NOT working hard... far from it. If you don't work hard, you'll NEVER reach a goal like that. But that's not ALL it takes, and that's what those who spout that kind of nonsense always neglect to point out.

So yeah, I think the idea that someone would NOT make two million dollars a year just to avoid paying higher taxes is ridiculous.

And then there are the folks who want you to believe that they are just like us. That our concerns are their concerns and that they are on our side. I used to have a boss who, when you'd complain about not having gotten a raise in a while, would look you square in the eye and say, "Hey, I have to buy the same loaf of bread you do. I'm in the same boat."

I, being the obnoxious, ungrateful guy that I am, would always reply, "Yeah, but you can buy a lot more loaves than I can... and you'll have a lot more left over after."

Now, it's not that I begrudge anyone money... even money that's not earned. Heck, I could make do with some of that. But the idea that someone would STOP trying to make millions of dollars because they'd be taxed more on it strikes me as ludicrous. But some people just seem to just love that kind of thinking.

And now that the furor has died down some over the stimulus packages, the faction of the right wing that I refer to as "republican't" has turned its attention to the health care bill currently on the floor of the Senate. I'm sure you've seen the commercial with the attractive, competent-looking forty-something 'neurosurgeon'. I'll bet that you've even wondered absently if she was really a doctor. Well, she is. Her name is Monica Wehby and she's a pediatric neurosurgeon in Portland, Oregon. She's legit... at least as far as her credentials go.

By all accounts, she's a very accomplished, talented and dedicated doctor. I applaud that.

That does not, however, mean that she has any special 'take' on the issue. I mean, about a year ago, she had a video clip up on youtube (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9LP_uAErvM) talking about how much we need change to the health care system. I have to wonder what kind of thought process goes on that leads one to say "well, this system doesn't work as it should so, instead of trying to fix it, let's do nothing".

While she puts forth her own opinions (supposedly) of the health care reform bill, she offers no proof of her assertions that the bill will raise costs and cover fewer people... neither of which are supported by the majority of experts. She also neglects to mention that just about every medical association disagrees with her.

Her "we all know that..." attitude irks me as well, particularly when mentioning the 2000 page size of the bill. Yes, that's a lot of pages, and a lot of words and punctuation marks and things, but as Mozart said about one of his pieces, it uses exactly as many notes as it needs; no more and no less.

Sure, we could carve down the bill until it was only once sentence... "Quit your screwin' around and do what's right"... but who would follow it? Who would decide what "screwin' around" and "right" were, and who would enforce it, etc.? The bill uses exactly as many notes as it needs. No more and no less. Sure, you can cut things out of it, and it'd be wonderful indeed if we didn't need regulations at all. But we do. So yea, 2K pages is a lot, but it's a lot less than 4K pages, right?

The other thing that irks me about these ads is that they come from rethinkreform.com.

Now, the very name of the website gets to me. The basic idea, I guess, is that we're going to fast to make good choices in health care reform. This from the people who have been obstructing and stonewalling the process for more than three decades now. All of a sudden they want us to believe that they don't have a problem with changing the health care system and their only concern is taking our time and doing it right? Yeah, I don't think so.

But what's most telling, what's most annoying about rethinkreform.com is that it's the brainchild of Richard Berman. Berman is the force behind lobbyist and special interest websites that downplay the dangers of things like mad cow disease (for the cattle industry) and cigarette smoking (for the tobacco industry), obesity (for the fast food industry) and drunk driving (for the alcohol industry).

His websites, paid for by lobbying interests, were called by 60 Minutes "The booze and food industries' weapons of mass destruction".

I don't want to stoop to using ad hominem arguments, but he's known throughout the lobbying industry as "Dr. Evil" by both enemies and friends.

While I'm not saying that we should be FOR reform simply because he's against it, I AM saying that his motives, and the veracity of anything contained in any of his ads, should be questioned. But enough about Doctor Evil.

Let's talk for just a second about the 40 members of the Senate who will almost certainly vote against the bill... the republican'ts. They remind me of a Harry Chapin song... "Get On With It". In the song, the male says "Oh, get on with it" repeatedly, looking for... well, what guys are looking for... while the female repeatedly says "Let's take it slowly".

That, of course changes, with the female talking about getting serious and saying "Let's get on with it" and the male then replying "Let's take it slowly".

The difference here, of course, is that the republican'ts will never say "Let's get on with it". They've had plenty of time during the past three decades to do something about a crisis which has been worsening the whole time. Their methodology seems (at least outwardly) to be to say "sure, the system is broken and not working correctly, but let's not do anything about it".

Sorry folks, that just won't work. So...

Oh, get on with it.
Let's get it done.

Life’s made up of moments,
Let’s not miss this one.

Thanks Harry. And thanks J, for pointing me to the title of a song long ago lost down deep in my gray matter though I knew all the lyrics by heart.

I guess it just goes to show that all I need to know in life I learned from Harry Chapin. [grin]

And since I’ve managed to mention Chapin again, let me urge you yet again to pick up a couple of extra items when you go shopping and drop them off at the local homeless shelter, food share or soup kitchen. Heck, make a little mini-event out of it and take the kids with you. Let them pick out the box of stuffing or the instant mashed potatoes or cans or corn or string beans. Let them put it in the donation box or walk it into the place with you. Let ’em know that it’s a good thing to do, that it’s easy, and that it’s important. If you help your kids get ready to be better adults, I guarantee you they’ll help you do the same.

Well, kiddies, that’s it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Adventures in the Video Game Aisle!
"Tony Hawk: Ride" Is Wireless!
Irides: Master of Blocks - Dreamcast!
And more!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Gift Guide: Adventures in the Video Game Aisle

The video game aisle can be intimidating for aspiring Santas who haven’t touched a joystick since "Pong." But it has something for everyone: riveting solo adventures, online multiplayer battles and fun-for-the-whole-family social games. Here are some of the best picks for this holiday season.

"Uncharted 2: Among Thieves" ($60, for the PlayStation 3, rated T for teen)

Rakish adventurer Nathan Drake hunts for Shangri-La in this sequel,

which mixes gunplay, fisticuffs and acrobatics with a witty, unpredictable story. One of the most beautiful video games ever published, it’s an interactive version of a Hollywood blockbuster - one of the good ones, like "Raiders of the Lost Ark."

"DJ Hero" ($120, for the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and Wii, rated T)

"The Beatles: Rock Band" ($60 for software only, $250 with instruments, for the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and Wii, rated T)

Rock-loving gamers have been grooving on "Guitar Hero" and "Rock Band" for a few years, but fans of hip-hop and dance music have been left out. "DJ Hero" corrects that, putting you behind the wheel of a fake turntable and letting you scratch and mix dozens of combinations of club tracks. It’s like hosting a rave in your living room.

For those who prefer classic rock, "The Beatles: Rock Band" lets you relive the career of the Fab Four, from a Liverpool club to their London rooftop farewell. It’s a loving tribute.

"New Super Mario Bros. Wii" ($50, for the Wii, rated E for everyone)

The latest Mario Bros. installment returns to the 2-D, side-scrolling action that made the spunky Italian plumber famous. This time, though, up to four people can play cooperatively, so more experienced gamers can guide newbies across the familiar fire pits and floating platforms. Now you can finally show your grandma - or your kids - what the original magic was about.

"Professor Layton & the Diabolical Box" ($35, for the Nintendo DS, rated E10+ for 10 and older)

Anyone who loves puzzles such as crosswords and sudoku will adore the latest chapter in the Professor Layton series, which weaves about 150 brainteasers into a clever mystery. Forget about those so-called "brain training" games; the exercises in logic, math, observation and object manipulation here really work out the gray matter.

"Dragon Age: Origins" ($60, for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, rated M for mature)

"Demon’s Souls" ($50, for the PlayStation 3, rated M)

Then there are the hardest of hardcore players who want the toughest challenges you can throw at them. "Dragon Age" is a classic tale of sword-and-sorcery that will test the skill and strategy of even the most jaded "Dungeons & Dragons" nut. "Demon’s Souls," another quasi-medieval epic, is so tough it will have mere mortals tearing their hair out. For the dedicated gamer, there’s nothing more satisfying.

"Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2" ($60, for the Xbox 360, PCs and PlayStation 3, rated M for mature)

This season’s monster hit continues the global battle against terrorists, and it’s bigger, louder and more brazen than its predecessor. A simulated airport terrorist attack has already drawn protest, and there’s plenty more in "Modern Warfare 2" that’s not for the squeamish. Older players with stronger stomachs will love it.

’Hawk’ Offers Wireless Skateboard Control

"Tony Hawk: Ride" ($120; Xbox360, Wii, PS3) is a groundbreaking video game that fits right in with the namesake skating legend’s no-rough-edges appeal. It’s a silky smooth experience with an inventive wireless skate deck controller and a friendly learning curve.

But watch out. You can fall here too. More on that later.

After connecting and calibrating the board in the Xbox360 version of the game, I selected a character with skin, hair and clothes to suit my taste. I grew up riding in Santa Cruz, Calif., a premiere West Coast skateboarding town that enjoys a bit of the tattered and torn aesthetic. So I donned some digital duds to match the style I’d grown up with.

The moment of truth came when I stepped on the controller board. It felt like a real skateboard under my feet, and not some plastic toy (which it essentially is). The top surface feels like grip tape. The nose and tail slope up gently, like the cut and contour of a modern deck.

There are no trucks or wheels to steer with. Instead, motion sensor panels are located at the front, back and sides of the board. I ride ‘goofy’ (right foot forward) and as I pushed my foot on the carpet past the sensor my character obediently pumped his way down the cement in Venice, Calif., in the opening session. When I stepped on the tail to tilt up the nose, I ollied and popped the on-screen board off the ground. Just like real life, except higher and better, of course.

The game unfolds into daunting rides around and over obstacles, through dry river beds in Los Angeles, and other world locales. There are trick sessions to challenge your balance and speed sessions where you’ll need to beat the clock to advance to the next level or unlock new trucks and wheels to outfit your deck with.

The basic ollie maneuver is the most important one to master in this game. You’ll need it in the street skating areas to hop up on benches and rails to grind for extra "style" points, and you’ll need it on speed runs because, well, things get in the way.

I had to remind myself not to try to pop the ollie too hard on the controller board. I found myself throwing my real-world balance off and working up a sweat when a lighter tap would have sufficed and kept my riding line tighter to the next obstacle.

I even scored enough points to unlock some tattoos for my character. I got a full chest tattoo of the Virgin Mary by Kat Von D of the TLC channel reality series "L.A. Ink." I’m not sure how well this feature will go over with a mother when her 13-year-old gets "Tony Hawk: Ride" for Christmas and ends up riding in the bowels of Los Angeles with his arms sleeved in ink.

In most sessions, the board is positioned with the nose pointing toward the screen. When I was on the half-pipe, however, I had to turn the board sideways and wave my hands over the sensors to ‘grab’ the board and bust some airborne tricks.

All told, "Tony Hawk: Ride" is a very well thought out advancement in gaming technology. The board feels real under your feet. The character

response on screen is stylish and accurate. The graphics are polished.

With this game, Tony Hawk is now firmly entrenched as the most dependable brand in skateboarding. In his prime, there were always more stylish big air riders like Christian Hosoi and more aggressive street riders like Mark Gonzales. But there’s something more marketable about the cleaner-cut Hawk, less of a gamble with his arms akimbo soaring high above the crowds.

With this namesake game, Hawk soars again.

Sure, some kid is going to take header running into the living room and pouncing on this gadget full speed in his socks. Moments later he’ll snicker and try to figure out a way to tell his friends he busted his wrist ‘fakeboarding.’ That alone makes this game a welcome addition to earth, if only for the shear irony of it all.

Three out of four stars. "Tony Hawk: Ride" is rated E10.

Does It Work?: Atari Flashback 2

Back in the 80s, it was every child’s dream around the holidays to find an Atari system under the tree. Video games, and the people who played them have changed a lot in 25 years. But Atari is betting the excitement their games created, still lives in the hearts of a bunch of 30 and 40 somethings.

This year, just in time for Christmas, they bring us the Atari Flashback 2 System. And this week, we see if the grandfather of video games, can make everything old, new again and pass the "Does It Work?" test.

In the late 70s early 80s, the equipment inside the Flashback 2 box would have cost you more than $1,200. The old system retailed for $200. And you’d pay about a thousand bucks for the 40 games now built in.

They’re all there, Adventure, Combat, Missile Command, and of course the game that started it all, Pong.

The console’s smaller than it used to be. Without cartridges, it doesn’t need the big slot for games anymore. But the joysticks fit in your hand, just like they used to. One thing that’s improved in 25 years is the wiring. This couldn’t be easier.

Eric, an 80s video game enthusiast has agreed to help us test-drive it. We started with a favorite, Asteroids. Eric picked up, right where he left off. Later it was Pitfall. Graphics have come a long way, but back in the day, they didn’t get any better than this. "Oh definitely. I thought I was in Heaven when I had this game," said Eric. The oil pits, those three crocodiles you have to jump on, the scorpion, they’re all here.

All the games were true to their old versions. About the only problem was we couldn’t figure out how to change games without turning the system off and on again. Come to think of it though, that’s exactly what you had to do in the old days when you switched out cartridges.

"Does It Work?" "I give it a yes," says Eric. "You plug it in and go. The games, the graphics, the sounds are exactly like what they were.

Some of them were a little hard to control but they were back then as well. Just the nostalgia of it really hit a home run. You sit there and all of a sudden these late nights with your friends just come right back to you."

The Atari Flashback 2, gets a "yes."

We paid $29.99 for the system at Target.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!

New Dreamcast Game Irides Promos To Be Given Out

On 12/12 of this year, or "block day" as it has been nicknamed, GOAT Store Publishing, a part of the GOAT Store, LLC will be releasing a brand new Dreamcast title. Irides: Master of Blocks is an incredible puzzler game where the player has to match blocks of similar colors together to eliminate them, score points and create combos.

The release of Irides: Master of Blocks will be the fifth Dreamcast game to be published from GOAT Store Publishing since their first game was released at the 2003 event! To celebrate the release of this fifth title, the GOAT Store, LLC has created a very special Dreamcast promo that will only be handed out to the first 1500 guests to the show!

On top of this, the GOAT Store, LLC has created a very special, very Limited Edition version of the game. This Limited Edition version has changed disc art, a new manual, new artwork, a special individually numbered collectible poster signed from the developer, and a special individually numbered 2" diameter collectible coin. This special version has been limited to only 144 copies, of which 55 will be on hand for lucky collecotrs at the Midwest Gaming Classic! The rest of the copies went on sale exclusively on the GOAT Store, LLC web site and have been selling quickly, so you'll want to show up at the Midwest Gaming Classic early to ensure you get a copy of one of the neatest and most exclusive Dreamcast Limited Editions to be created!

For more information on Irides: Master of Blocks visit http://www.goatstore.com/News_Irides_Release/

To purchase the Limited Edition before the show (while supplies last) visit http://www.goatstore.com/Products/Sega/Dreamcast/?product=372075

To purchase the standard version, visit http://www.goatstore.com/Products/Sega/Dreamcast/?product=372070

The Midwest Gaming Classic, the trade show where gamers rule, is an annual event that has been held since 2001. The show is open to all interested attendees and includes all aspects of console gaming, computers and arcade video and pinball machines from Pong to the PS3 and more! Ticket pre-sale

is available online until March 1st, 2010 and will guarantee each person purchasing a Saturday ticket a swag bag. As always, kids ages 12 and under get in free with paid adult admission! You can visit the official Midwest Gaming Classic web site at http://www.midwestgamingclassic.com/

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Northrop Links to Academics To Boost Cyber Defense

Northrop Grumman Corp unveiled Tuesday an industry-academic research group to tackle growing cyber threats to U.S. computer networks and to networked infrastructure.

Joining the Pentagon's No. 3 supplier by sales are cyber research arms of Carnegie Mellon, The Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Purdue University.

The initiative is the latest by a major U.S. defense contractor aimed at hatching solutions to cyber threats at a time that big-ticket weapons programs are being squeezed by cost-cutting imperatives.

Northrop plans to invest an unspecified "number of millions of dollars per year" to fund graduate fellowships and other research for at least five years and probably much longer, said Robert Brammer, chief technology officer for Northrop Grumman's Information Systems business unit.

"We need significant new technology developments," implemented widely, to counter growing cyber threats to the economy and to U.S. national security, he told a news conference. The theme was echoed by representatives of Carnegie Mellon's CyLab, MIT's Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Lab and Purdue's Center for Education and Research in Information Assurance and Security.

Northrop will deal on a case-by-case basis with each research institute on splitting jointly developed intellectual property, said Brammer.

The group, called the Northrop Grumman Cybersecurity Research Consortium, initially will sponsor 10 projects with an eye to such things as attribution in cyberspace, supply chain risk and securing critical infrastructure networks, the company said.

The group's members will coordinate research projects, swap information and author joint case studies, among other efforts to speed hardware and software solutions into practice, participants said.

The consortium will serve "to help increase our nation's security in cyberspace," Brammer added in a statement. He said in a brief interview he expects some research results as soon as next year.

Northrop’s cyber work was in the news recently for a report prepared by the company that implicated the Chinese authorities in extensive cyber activities against the United States.

The report, commissioned by the congressionally chartered U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, said Beijing appeared to be conducting "a long-term, sophisticated, computer network exploitation campaign" against the U.S. government and U.S. defense industries.

Brammer told the news conference that identifying a cyber aggressor was "very difficult" with current technology.

Lockheed Martin Corp, the Pentagon’s No. 1 supplier by sales, last month announced the formation of a cyber security technology alliance of its own with leading technology providers, including Microsoft Corp, Cisco Systems Inc and Dell Inc.

Boeing Co, the second-biggest Pentagon contractor, also has put together a cyber-security research alliance, headquartered in Washington state, with university and commercial partners, said Barbara Fast, the company’s vice president of cyber and information solutions.

Sprint Fed Customer GPS Data to Cops Over 8 Million Times

A blogger has released audio of Sprint’s Electronic Surveillance Manager describing the carrier’s cooperation with law enforcement. Among the revelations are that Sprint has so far filled over 8 million requests from LEOs for customer GPS data.

Christopher Soghoian, a graduate student at Indiana University’s School of Informatics and Computing, has made public an audio recording of Sprint/Nextel’s Electronic Surveillance Manager describing how his company has provided GPS location data about its wireless customers to law enforcement over 8 million times. That’s potentially millions of Sprint/Nextel customers who not only were probably unaware that their wireless provider even had an Electronic Surveillance Department, but who certainly did not know that law enforcement offers could log into a special Sprint Web portal and, without ever having to demonstrate probable cause to a judge, gain access to geolocation logs detailing where they’ve been and where they are.

Through a mix of documents unearthed by Freedom of Information Act requests and the aforementioned recording, Soghoian describes how "the government routinely obtains customer records from ISPs detailing the telephone numbers dialed, text messages, emails and instant messages sent, web pages browsed, the queries submitted to search engines, and geolocation data, detailing exactly where an individual was located at a particular date and time."

The fact that federal, state, and local law enforcement can obtain communications "metadata" - URLs of sites visited, e-mail message headers, numbers dialed, GPS locations, etc. - without any real oversight or reporting requirements *should* be shocking, but it isn’t. The courts ruled in 2005 that law enforcement doesn’t need to show probable cause to obtain your physical location via the cell phone grid. All of the aforementioned metadata can be accessed with an easy-to-obtain pen

register/trap & trace order. But given the volume of requests, it’s hard to imagine that the courts are involved in all of these.

Soghoian’s lengthy post makes at least two important points, the first of which is that there are no reliable statistics on the real volume and scope of government surveillance because such numbers are either not published (sometimes in violation of the legally mandated reporting requirements) or they contain huge gaps. The second point is that the lack of reporting makes it difficult to determine just how involved the courts actually are in all of this, in terms of whether these requests are all backed by subpoenas.

Underlying both of these issues is the fact that Sprint has made it so easy for law enforcement to gain access to customer data on a 24/7 basis through the use of its Web portal and large compliance department. Regarding the latter, here’s another quote from Paul Taylor, the aforementioned Sprint/Nextel Electronic Surveillance Manager:

"In the electronic surveillance group at Sprint, I have 3 supervisors. 30 ES techs, and 15 contractors. On the subpoena compliance side, which is anything historical, stored content, stored records, is about 35 employees, maybe 4-5 supervisors, and 30 contractors. There’s like 110 all together."

All of those people are there solely to serve up customer data to law enforcement, and other comments by Taylor indicate that his staff will probably grow. Sprint only recently made the GPS data available through the Web portal, and that has caused the number of requests to go through the roof. The company apparently plans on expanding the menu of surveillance options that are accessible via the Web. Taylor again:

> "[M]y major concern is the volume of requests. We have a lot of things that are automated but that’s just scratching the surface. One of the things, like with our GPS tool. We turned it on the web interface for law enforcement about one year ago last month, and we just passed 8 million requests. So there is no way on earth my team could have handled 8 million requests from law enforcement, just for GPS alone. So the tool has just really caught on fire with law enforcement. They also love that it is extremely inexpensive to operate and easy, so, just [because of] the sheer volume of requests they anticipate us automating other features, and I just don’t know how we’ll handle the millions and millions of requests that are going to come in."

I’m sure they’ll find some way to deal with the "millions and millions" of warrantless surveillance requests, and no one will bother to even curb the practice, much less stop it. I’ve been reporting on this exact metadata/surveillance issue for years now, and it just gets worse. The stressed, jobless, indebted public doesn’t care, and Congress doesn’t either. If I’m still on this beat in 5 years, I’m sure I’ll still be rewriting this same story for the thousandth time.

Apple Reaches Settlement with Mac Cloner Psystar

After more than a year of legal wrangling, Apple has come to terms with its Mac cloning nemesis Psystar. On Monday, Apple at least partially settled its copyright lawsuit against the Doral, Fla.-based company that

has been building hardware that runs Mac OS X.

The Wall Street Journal reports Apple will dismiss all its trademark, trade-dress and state-law claims against Psystar in exchange for unspecified damages. Other reports set the damages at $2.7 million.

Despite the settlement, Psystar, which previously filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, appeared to still be selling cloned Macs. Apple and Psystar were not immediately available for comment, but Psystar's web site continued to offer hardware and software on Tuesday. By Tuesday afternoon, the hardware was still displayed but marked "Out of stock."

The settlement comes just days after Apple asked a federal judge to close Psystar's Mac clone operation and ante up $2.1 million in damages. In late November, Apple filed a permanent injunction to ban Psystar from using, selling or owning software that makes it possible to crack Apple's OS encryption key and run Mac OS X on Psystar's hardware.

On Nov. 14, U.S. District Court Judge William Alsup ruled in favor of Apple in the copyright suit. Alsup also ruled that Psystar violated the Digital Millennium Copyright Act by installing Apple's Mac OS X on the hardware it sold. But Psystar didn't stop selling cloned Macs. Apple insisted a permanent injunction was its only option in the face of Psystar's continued copyright violations.

Psystar had previously sued Apple in a Florida federal court, claiming Apple was running a monopoly. Psystar accused Apple of forcing a tie between the Mac OS X operating system and Apple's hardware in the end-user licensing agreement. Psystar argued that Apple's EULA unlawfully restrained trade by barring users from installing its operating system on non-Apple hardware. The judge dismissed those charges.

Psystar wasn't the first to cite potential antitrust issues with Apple. The Federal Trade Commission investigated whether Google and Apple were violating antitrust laws last summer and Apple was accused of maintaining a monopoly in the online music, video and MP3 player market in 2008.

"The Psystar issue is an annoyance for Apple because this case places the company in an antitrust light, and that's a light they can ill-afford at the moment. Apple does have exposure, though mostly on the MP3 player side," said Rob Enderle, principal analyst at the Enderle Group.

Much the same way opponents argued against Microsoft during the antitrust suit against it, Enderle said, some argue that if the market is subdivided, Apple has a monopoly with its iTunes and iPods. Apple doesn't want any company making antitrust claims against it, which may have spurred the settlement.

"Clearly, Psystar was in the process of going out of business, so that meant a settlement was at least possible," Enderle said. "Apparently, they have found some common ground and have been able to reach some kind of agreement. But we still don't know what Psystar is allowed to do under this agreement."

Yahoo!, Microsoft Extend Talks on Web Search Agreement

Yahoo! and Microsoft announced Friday that they have finalized the details of their planned Internet search and advertising partnership.

The companies hope to implement the deal next year with the approval of anti-trust regulators.

"Yahoo! and Microsoft welcome the broad support the deal has received from key players in the advertising industry and remain hopeful that the closing of the transaction can occur in early 2010," the companies said in a joint statement.

"Microsoft and Yahoo! believe that this deal will create a sustainable and more compelling alternative in search that can provide consumers, advertisers and publishers real choice, better value and more innovation."

Yahoo! and Microsoft had originally planned to complete their agreement by October 27 but extended talks "given the complex nature of the transaction."

The plan to ink a 10-year Web search and advertising pact was unveiled in July and promises to set the stage for a Yahoo!-Microsoft offensive against Google, the king of the lucrative search and advertising market.

Under the no-cash deal, Yahoo! will use Microsoft’s new Bing search engine on its own sites while Yahoo! will provide the exclusive global sales force for premium search advertisers.

Bing Goes Down for a Half Hour

A day after trumpeting various enhancements to Bing, including the beta version of an improved mapping service, Microsoft had to apologize for a widespread outage that kept the search engine offline for about 30 minutes on Thursday evening.

During the outage, users either couldn’t get the site to load at all, or they received truncated result pages for their search queries, Microsoft said.

"The cause of the outage was a configuration change during some internal testing that had unfortunate and unintended consequences," wrote Satya Nadella, senior vice president of Microsoft’s Online Services Division, in an official blog.

"We are running a post mortem to find out how our software and processes need to be improved to prevent anything like this from happening again," he added.

Bing is the third most popular search engine in the U.S., where it was used for 9.9 percent of queries in October, according to comScore. Yahoo ranked second with 18 percent and Google stood all alone in first place with 65.4 percent.

Launched in late May and supported with a broad and aggressive marketing campaign, Bing is the latest iteration of Microsoft’s search engine and expectations for it are very high.

Five years ago, Microsoft’s search engine held a 16.3 percent share of U.S. search queries, according to comScore, but in the coming years it and Yahoo’s search engine lost a lot of ground to Google, which saw its engine’s popularity steadily rise until reaching its current dominant position.

Microsoft Denies "Black Screen of Death" Issues

Microsoft Corp said on Tuesday it could find no evidence that recent security updates were causing problems with its new Windows 7 operating system, which some have dubbed the "black screen of death."

The problem, which has caused a small number of users to see a completely black screen after logging on, was identified by British software security firm Prevx last week, and received widespread attention after a report by the BBC on Tuesday.

Prevx had claimed that changes to Microsoft’s operating system’s registry - the database that stores configuration settings - were the most likely cause of the error, but Microsoft denied that.

"Microsoft has investigated reports that its November security updates made changes to permissions in the registry that are resulting in system issues for some customers," said Microsoft representative Christopher Budd.

"The company has found those reports to be inaccurate and our comprehensive investigation has shown that none of the recently released updates are related to the behavior described in the reports," he said.

He added that Microsoft’s support teams were not seeing this as a big issue for users, but urged Microsoft customers to contact support for free assistance in the event of problems.

Microsoft Says Some Windows PCs Get ‘Black Screen’

Microsoft Corp. says it’s not to blame for a problem that is causing a "limited" number of Windows computers to boot up to a blank black screen.

The problem is cropping up on computers running the new Windows 7 software as well as Windows XP and Vista.

Microsoft says its customer service department doesn’t consider the black screen problem a "broad customer issue." It hasn’t identified the problem but says some malicious programs on the Internet are known to cause black screens.

A British security company called Prevx says 50,000 people have downloaded a tool it offers to fix the problem.

’Black Screen’ Overhyped and Not Microsoft’s Fault

After creating great distress in security circles, an issue with Microsoft Windows has proven relatively minor. The problem, labeled the Black Screen of Death, was initially thought to be widespread. Indeed, British security firm Prevx posted a series of blog items suggesting that several million computers using Windows XP, Vista and Windows 7 could be compromised. The company said the problem often is associated with two Windows security patches, KB915597 and KB976098.

Prevx has since backtracked, though a bit obliquely. In a posting Wednesday, the firm said the problem is still widespread and its free tool to fix the issue had been downloaded more than 50,000 times.

The company denied that it made concrete claims. "As you will see, at no time have we categorically stated that these patches are the cause of the Black Screen problem," it said. "We shared our initial findings around the two patches with Microsoft, conducted further tests, and have confirmed that these specific updates are not the root cause."

Mike Murray, chief information security officer for Foreground Security, said the entire affair is a non-story. "I am absolutely amazed this became the story it became," he said. "They say the number [of infected machines] is 50,000. I say it’s more like 10 percent of that. I hate it when security companies throw out all this hyperbole. I have known large organizations ... that are using Windows 7 in large parts of their [companies], and I have not heard one report from any of my clients on this problem."

Microsoft also called the problem overhyped, if not nonexistent. "Microsoft has investigated reports that its November security updates made changes to permissions in the registry that that are resulting in system issues for some customers," said a statement attributed to Christopher Budd, Microsoft’s security response communications lead.

"The company has found those reports to be inaccurate and our comprehensive investigation has shown that none of the recently released updates are related to the behavior described in the reports," the statement says. "While we were not contacted by the organization who originally made these reports, we have proactively contacted them with our findings."

The statement also says that Microsoft’s support organization doesn’t see any issues. "The claims also do not match any known issues that have been documented in the security bulletins or KB articles," it said.

Roger Halbheer, chief security adviser for Microsoft EMEA, was not amused. His post at TechNet Blogs is critical of Prevx and, by implication, the many sites that uncritically carried the initial and inaccurate reports.

Halbheer concludes users should be careful who they listen to. "[Y]ou should now make your risk assessment and decide which source you want to trust. For me, the ultimate source for information you should build your assessment on is neither Twitter nor your brother’s sister-in-law’s father’s brother (unless he works for Microsoft’s security) but our web site."

Murray agrees that Prevx’s approach was wrong. "I would hope they would work with the vendors and be a little more responsible in the way they run around talking about this stuff," he said. "I almost laughed when they said that they feel bad about embarrassing Microsoft. They got

themselves all over the news by embarrassing Microsoft."

EBay and Craigslist Battle Heads to Court

It’s a story fraught with accusations of broken promises, backroom deals and deception, leaving an established Internet giant fighting to preserve its valuable stake in a well-loved classified advertising website.

A lawsuit filed by EBay Inc against Craigslist heads to a Delaware state courtroom next Monday, for a trial that promises to reveal the inner workings of two benchmark Web companies and bring to the witness stand two Internet pioneers: former eBay Chief Executive Meg Whitman and Craigslist founder Craig Newmark.

The twice-delayed trial will likely underscore the glaring differences in the companies’ approaches to business.

EBay, one of the high-flyers in the dot-com boom, pioneered online auctions and spurred millions of people around the world to sell and buy on the Web.

Despite generating $8.5 billion of revenue in 2008 and employing thousands of people, the San Jose-based company has been forced to broaden its market to better compete and expand beyond its traditional online auctions.

In contrast, privately held Craigslist, with only a few dozen employees, is now the top U.S. online classifieds site, beloved for its mostly-free service to help people find homes, adopt pets or sell junk from their garages.

Craigslist executives say they are driven by community, not a lust for profit.

At issue is eBay’s minority ownership in San Francisco’s Craigslist, a company that eBay says could potentially be worth several billion dollars.

In its April 2008 lawsuit, eBay claimed that Newmark and Chief Executive James Buckmaster hatched a "coercive plan" in 2007 and conducted "clandestine transactions" that diluted eBay’s stake to 24.85 percent from 28.4 percent.

Because eBay’s ownership fell below 25 percent, it lost its seat on Craigslist’s board.

EBay said an original shareholder agreement to be produced in court clearly outlined each party’s rights and responsibilities.

"We are very confident we acted properly throughout the relationship," Deputy General Counsel Mary Huser said in an interview. "We were open and honest regarding what we were doing and our intentions."

A Delaware Chancery Court judge in October dismissed two eBay charges, but five counts including breach of fiduciary duty and issues related to the dilution of eBay’s stake remain.

Craigslist, in a separate lawsuit, filed in San Francisco Superior Court

a month after eBay sued in Delaware, charged eBay with unfair competition, misappropriation of proprietary information, false advertising, trademark infringement and other deceptive practices.

In both cases, Craigslist claims that eBay used its seat on the board to obtain information and expertise to launch a competing classified advertising business, all the while denying that was its intention.

In the run-up to the trial of the Delaware lawsuit, which is expected to last two weeks, Craigslist has depicted its larger rival in an unsavory light.

"EBay has unclean hands," fueled by a frustrated desire to own Craigslist outright, Craigslist said in a pretrial brief.

Craigslist claimed that after eBay in 2004 bought shares from one of Craigslist's original investors, worried perhaps that a rival such as Google Inc might swoop in if it tarried, Whitman maintained that eBay had no designs on the company, and that Craigslist would become its "play in classifieds."

But Craigslist said eBay never revealed that it was developing its own classified site, Kijiji, which it launched internationally in 2005 and in the United States in 2007.

"If it could not own Craigslist, eBay would exploit its position as an insider and use Craigslist's confidential information, experience, skill and innovations against Craigslist," Craigslist wrote.

Whitman is now a Republican candidate to succeed Arnold Schwarzenegger as governor of California. Her spokesman declined to comment, referring questions to eBay.

Craigslist also claims that eBay used deceptive tactics to direct traffic away from its site.

Legal briefs show online ads allegedly paid for by eBay used Craigslist's name but diverted users to Kijiji or eBay.

Craigslist also contended that eBay, through its board seat, obtained confidential information such as traffic and listings data, and passed it to Kijiji executives. Former eBay board member Josh Silverman spearheaded the Kijiji launch, it said.

Current eBay Chief Executive John Donahoe is not expected to testify. He has tried to play down the significance of the trial, saying it is simply an issue of whether eBay owns 25 percent or 28 percent of Craigslist. He calls eBay's stake in the company a "nice investment."

The Delaware case is eBay Domestic Holdings Inc v Newmark, et al, Delaware Chancery Court, No. 3705-CC.

Teen Internet Addicts More Likely To Self Harm

Teenagers who are addicted to the Internet are more likely to engage in self-harm behavior, according to an Australian-Chinese study.

Researchers surveyed 1,618 adolescents aged 13 to 18 from China's Guangdong Province about behavior such as hitting themselves, pulling their own hair, or pinching or burning themselves, and gave them a test to gauge Internet addiction.

Internet addiction has been classified as a mental health problem since the mid-1990s with symptoms similar to other addictions.

The test found that about 10 percent of the students surveyed were moderately addicted to the Internet, while less than one percent were severely addicted.

The students ranked as moderately addicted to the Internet were 2.4 times more likely to have self-injured one to five times in the past 6 months than students without an addiction, said Dr. Lawrence Lam from the University of Notre Dame Australia.

The moderately-to-severely addicted students were almost five times more likely than non-addicted students to have self-injured six or more times in the past 6 months, Lam and his colleagues from Guangzhou's Sun Yat-Sen University reported.

"In recent years, with the greater availability of the Internet in most Asian countries, Internet addiction has become an increasing mental problem among adolescents," the researchers said in their study published in the journal Injury Prevention.

"Many studies have reported associations between Internet addiction, psychiatric symptoms and depression among adolescents."

They said their results suggested a "strong and significant" association between Internet addiction and self-injury in adolescence even after accounting for other variables previously associated with the behavior, including depression, family dissatisfaction, or stressful life events.

They said this suggested that Internet addiction is an independent risk factor for self-injurious behavior.

Experts interpret Internet addiction, among other things, as feelings of depression, nervousness, moodiness when not online, which only go away when the addict gets back online.

Fantasizing or being preoccupied about being online are other signs of Internet addiction.

"All these behaviors may be rooted in some common ... factors that require further exploration," they said.

Groom 'Tweets' Marriage from Altar

A US groom who loves social networking as much as his bride pulled out a cell phone during their wedding to 'tweet' and update his Facebook page.

Youtube footage shows Dana Hanna, from Maryland, whip out a telephone from his suit, interrupting the minister. Thoughtfully, he then produces a second phone and hands that to the bride.

"Standing at the altar with @TracyPage where a second ago she became my wife! Gotta go, time to kiss my bride," Hanna wrote on his Twitter account from the altar steps.

He also updated his status on Facebook to married.

"I now pronounce you husband and wife. It’s official on Facebook, it’s official in my book," the minister says to laughter from guests. "You may now kiss the bride."

The video from the November 21 wedding can be viewed at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWoiuXCE9Xo.

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